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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [AJ](#) [GG](#) [RU](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR FEARS RUSSIA'S
NEW ERA IN SOUTH CAUCASUS

REF: A. STATE 89769
[1](#)B. STATE 87763
[1](#)C. STATE 90980
[1](#)D. BAKU 812
[1](#)E. BAKU 813

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Aliyev's International Relations Advisor sees Russian actions in Georgia as "the beginning of a new era," with Azerbaijan's energy export routes, and consequently, the country's independence and sovereignty, ultimately at risk. Russia's acts were premeditated, with a goal of reasserting Moscow's influence over the South Caucasus and its important energy transport routes, and Azerbaijan now fears the Russians will not withdraw. Nonetheless, Moscow has not made any direct threats to Azerbaijan; Baku has intentionally been "prudent" in its relations with Russia. President Aliyev welcomes the visit this week of Vice President Cheney, while being pessimistic on prospects for near-term resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Regional stability and security are essential, as Iran also continues to be a threat. Azerbaijan continues to send assistance to Georgia, but Baku is skeptical of Turkey's proposal to form a Caucasus "platform." End Summary

Russians Attack Weakest Link, Eye Energy Transport

[1](#)2. (C) Echoing themes raised by President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov in discussions on events in Georgia (reftels), the President's International Relations Advisor Novruz Mammedov told the Ambassador on August 29 that the Russian invasion of Georgia is the "beginning of a new era," and one which poses very serious difficulties for Azerbaijan. The main aim of the Russian move, Mammedov said, was to "cut the route" that allowed the West access to Azerbaijani, Caspian and Central Asian hydrocarbons by attacking "the weakest, and the key, link in the chain -- Georgia." Abkhazia and South Ossetia were just an excuse, and are lost unless someone is willing to go to war for them, Mammedov maintained.

[1](#)3. (C) Mammedov suggested that the most serious long-term danger from the current situation is the likelihood that "the Russians won't leave." Moscow's forces are consolidating positions in Georgia in buffer zones that are in close proximity to key energy transport facilities, including the railroad, Azerbaijani facilities at the port of Kulevi, and pipelines crossing Georgia, which will give them effective control over energy transport. Mammedov said that while there is no hard proof, some in Azerbaijan are convinced that the recent attack on the BTC pipeline in Turkey was a Russian-inspired action, given Russia's close ties with the

Kurds.

¶4. (C) Mammedov said that the Russians had prepared their actions in Georgia for some time, and that in retrospect it was possible to see it coming. Medvedev and Putin have been "united and firm" in their desire to re-establish Russian influence in the Caucasus, and this has become increasingly evident in their interactions with Azerbaijan in recent months. Although Russia has not made any direct threats to Azerbaijan after Georgia, Azerbaijan reads Putin's and Medvedev's comments that what happened to Georgia "could happen to you," and that "the South Caucasus belong to us," as clearly directed at Azerbaijan.

¶5. (C) Mammedov said that the Russians had now "shown their true face" to the world by actions in Georgia in complete defiance of international norms. Given its history with the Russians, "Azerbaijan has always known they could do something like this," and for this reason, Azerbaijan has always been "prudent" in its dealings with Russia. Russia in recent times has been "very irritated" by Azerbaijan's support for Nabucco and the Odessa-Brody-Plotsk-Gdansk pipelines; considering that the Russians sent troops to massacre Azerbaijani citizens in 1990 "when there was nothing here" that threatened Russia's vital interests, it is entirely possible that they would take strong steps to protect their interests today, given Azerbaijan's role as an independent energy supplier.

Implications for Nagorno-Karabakh

¶6. (C) Mammedov said that President Aliyev is now more pessimistic than ever with respect to a resolution of the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Since a resolution, he said, could mean that Azerbaijan would send its energy resources west through Armenia, "the Russians will never permit it." Aliyev believes that Russia will now support Armenia more forcefully vis-a-vis Azerbaijan.

Iran Still A Worry

¶7. (C) Mammedov said that President Aliyev is "deeply worried, deeply concerned" about developments and Azerbaijan's difficult position, because "it is not only Russia Azerbaijan has to worry about -- it is also Iran." Given the opportunity, Mammedov said, Iran would "do even worse" than Russia. It is critical to restore regional stability. The most important thing the United States and the West can do now from Azerbaijan's point of view is to "coordinate the world" in a strong united response to make the Russians realize they've committed a grave error, and to work together to "save Georgia."

V.P. Visit Will Irritate the Russians

¶8. (C) "If the US and all its allies can coordinate the EU and others, we can do something," Mammedov said. However, Azerbaijan sees this as "problematic" given the political transition in the United States. "We cannot be sure if decisions taken in the coming months will endure." Mammedov said the President is looking forward to the visit of Vice President Cheney, but added that in his personal view the visit "will irritate the Russians even more against us. We know the visit was planned before events in Georgia. They don't. They won't believe us even if we tell them so -- even if they believe us they won't say so, it is not in their interests to do so."

Azerbaijan Continues Assistance, Criticizes Turkish Proposal

¶9. (C) Mammedov outlined the support Azerbaijan has provided to Georgia in the form of food, medicine, equipment and finances and said Azerbaijan will continue to help Georgia. Azerbaijan itself has suffered up to a billion dollars in losses already from the conflict. The cutting of the railroad line in Georgia had slowed exports and blocked many

imports, with "thousands" of railroad cars stranded on either side of the border. He dismissed Turkey's proposal for a "platform" for Caucasus stability as amateur diplomacy, saying that Turkey was all over the map -- first they had proposed a Caucasus Union to include the US, Iran, Russia and the Caucasus countries ("impossible"), then a "Caucasus forum," and now the platform. Aliyev had agreed to look at the proposal in the event it developed into "something good" for Azerbaijan, but remained very skeptical anything would come of it.

Comment:

¶10. (C) Mammedov, like many high-ranking Azerbaijani officials, sees Russia's actions in Georgia with a view to energy exports and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, critical interests for Azerbaijan. From Baku's perspective, Moscow's main objective is control of Caspian energy resources, with Georgia being the chokepoint on non-Russia access to markets via Turkey or the Black Sea. Like other observers here, Mammedov worries that Russia's military action in Georgia and subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have strengthened the hand of the Armenians, and weakened Azerbaijan's leverage over Yerevan at the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiating table. The USG message to Azerbaijan in coming weeks and months should center on these two issues: regional security and stability to enable oil and gas exports to the West, and a strong message on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity with a goal of reaching a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

DERSE